

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 ACDA-07 EUR-12 EB-08 AID-05
/103 W

-----013168 230814Z /21

R 221500Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8355

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3598

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, PGOV, KS, SN

SUBJ: MFA DISCUSSES GOS POSITION ON U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM
SOUTH KOREA

REF: MANILA 12767

1. SUMMARY: STAFFDEL BINNENDIJK OF SENATE FOREIGN
RELATIONS COMMITTEE AND EMBOFFS MET AUG. 18 WITH MFA
OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS GOS REACTION TO PLANNED WITHDRAWAL
OF U.S. GROUND FORCES FROM SOUTH KOREA. IT WAS EVIDENT
THAT GOS OFFICIALS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE DECISION,
FEELING IT WAS POORLY TIMED AND MADE FOR DOMESTIC
POLITICAL REASONS. WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT SINGAPORE
IS NOT DIRECTLY THREATENED BY THIS WITHDRAWAL, THERE
WAS APPREHENSION THAT IT COULD BE EVIDENCE OF POST-
VIETNAM TENDENCIES TOWARD "FORTRESS AMERICA", A TREND
THEY WOULD FIND HIGHLY DESTABILIZING FOR THIS REGION.
IT WAS ALSO EVIDENT THAT DESPITE U.S. REASSURANCES,
GOS IS NOT CONVINCED U.S. IS DETERMINED TO REMAIN AN
ASIAN POWER. IT CLEARLY HOPES FOR A MORE EXPLICIT
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DEFINITION OF U.S. POLICY IN ASIA. END SUMMARY.

2. SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE STAFFER
BINNENDIJK CALLED ON THE AMBASSADOR, MET WITH THE
DCM, ECON/POL SECTION OFFICERS AND DAO OFFICERS FOR
INFORMAL BRIEFINGS DURING HIS AUG. 18 HALF-DAY VISIT
TO SINGAPORE. AN AFTERNOON MEETING WAS SET UP WITH

WORKING-LEVEL MFA OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS SINGAPORE'S
VIEWS OF THE PLANNED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. GROUND FORCES
FROM KOREA. ECON/POL
OFFICERS ACCOMPANIES HIM TO THE
MEETING.

3. THE MFA OFFICIALS EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT THE
TROOP WITHDRAWAL DECISION REFLECTED DOMESTIC POLITICAL
CONSIDERATIONS AND THAT NOT ENOUGH ATTENTION HAD BEEN
PAID TO THE CONSEQUENCES. THE SINGLAUB AFFAIR WAS
SEEN AS DISCONCERTING EVIDENCE OF THIS. THE
SINGAPOREANS ARGUED THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE
WITHDRAWAL WAS UNTIMELY, EXACERBATING ALREADY
EXISTING UNCERTAINTY IN ASIA AS TO WHAT THE U.S.
POST-VIETNAM ROLE IN ASIA WILL BE. WHILE CONCEDING
THAT THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES IN VIETNAM AND
REDUCTION OF FORCES IN KOREA COULD BE VIEWED AS
MOVEMENT AWAY FROM COLD WAR POLICIES AND TOWARD
LOWER TENSIONS, THEY BELIEVED THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT
SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEFERRED UNTIL U.S. POLITICAL AND
SECURITY INTERESTS IN ASIA WERE MORE CLEARLY AND
DEMONSTRABLY ASSERTED. NOW THAT WITHDRAWAL HAS
BEEN ANNOUNCED, THEY FELT THAT THEY COULD NOT
DISMISS THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT REPRESENTS
MOVEMENT TOWARDS A "FORTRESS AMERICA" POSTURE WITH
OUTSIDE DEFENSES CONCERNED ONLY WITH JAPAN AND
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WESTERN EUROPE. ASIAN FRIENDS OF THE U.S. SIMPLY
DO NOT KNOW THE EXTENT OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO
THEM, THEY SAID.

4. POSSIBLE JAPANESE REACTION TO THE WITHDRAWAL
WAS ALSO WORRISOME TO THE SINGAPOREANS. SOUTHEAST
ASIAN COUNTRIES STILL REMEMBER WW II JAPANESE
OCCUPATION, THEY STRESSED, AND WOULD NOT LIKE TO
SEE SIGNIFICANT JAPANESE REARMAMENT. BINNENDIJK
SAID HE BELIEVED THAT ANY JAPANESE REACTION IN THE
SHORT RUN WOULD PROBABLY INVOLVE ONLY QUALITATIVE
IMPROVEMENTS TO THEIR DEFENSE FORCES, AND THAT
JAPAN'S DEFENSE SPENDING WOULD PROBABLY REMAIN
BELOW ONE PERCENT OF GNP FOR AT LEAST FIVE YEARS.

5. THE MFA OFFICIALS SAID THAT THE GOS SAW THE
USSR AS THE MAIN SECURITY THREAT AND LOOKED TO
THE PRESENCE OF THE SEVENTH FLEET AS A COUNTER-
BALANCE TO THE SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE. THEY SUGGESTED
THAT WITHOUT THE SEVENTH FLEET, THE GOS MIGHT FIND
IT DIFFICULT TO RESIST SOVIET DEMANDS FOR SPECIAL
PORT FACILITIES.

6. VIETNAM WAS SEEN BY THE SINGAPOREANS AS THE OTHER SERIOUS THREAT TO THEIR SECURITY, WITH ALL OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES UNEASY ABOUT HANOI'S INTENTIONS. THE GREATEST LONG-TERM DANGER IN THEIR VIEW IS THAT OF AN INDONESIAN-VIETNAMESE CONFLICT, WHICH THEY COULD ENVISAGE AS A RESULT OF THE RIVALRY FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO NATIONS.

7. BINNENDIJK WAS QUESTIONED BY THE SINGAPOREANS AS TO THE U.S. REACTION IF THAILAND WERE TO BE PULLED INTO OPEN CONFLICT WITH CAMBODIA AND THEN SEEK U.S. ASSISTANCE. BINNENDIJK NOTED THAT HIS REPLY WAS NECESSARILY SPECULATIVE, IN THAT THE U.S. REACTION CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD DEPEND ON BOTH PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ACTION, BUT SAID HE COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF THE COMMITMENT OF U.S. GROUND FORCES IN THAILAND. SOME AIR SUPPORT MIGHT BE A POSSIBILITY, AS WELL AS A MILITARY AID PACKAGE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3598

8. ASKED HOW FAR THE U.S. INTENDED TO GO IN SEEKING NORMALIZATION WITH VIETNAM, BINNENDIJK SAID THERE

WERE INDICATIONS THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION WAS PREPARED TO GO PRETTY FAR, ALTHOUGH NOTING THAT CONGRESS REMAINS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO ANY TYPE OF AID TO VIETNAM. ONE OF THE MFA OFFICIALS SAID THAT HE FELT AN ACCOMMODATING POLICY WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE AND THAT ONE MUST BE TOUGH IN DEALING WITH THE VIETNAMESE, WHO HAD GROWN ARROGANT AFTER WHAT THEY SAW AS THEIR DEFEAT OF A SUPER-POWER.

9. THE SPEEDY CONCLUSION OF PHILIPPINE BASE NEGOTIATIONS, ESPECIALLY FOR SUBIC BAY, WAS SEEN BY THE SINGAPOREANS AS ONE MEANS OF REAFFIRMING THE U.S. COMMITMENT IN THE AREA. THE UPCOMING U.S.-ASEAN TALKS WOULD ALSO PROVIDE A FORUM WHERE U.S. INTENTIONS COULD BE CLARIFIED. THEY FELT THAT REASSURANCE THAT THE U.S. WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY AN ACTIVE SECURITY ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IS NECESSARY NOT ONLY FROM A SECURITY VIEWPOINT, BUT AS A PREREQUISITE FOR ECONOMIC WELL-BEING. THE ATTRACTION OF FOREIGN INVESTMENTS INTO THE REGION WOULD
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DEPEND ON THE OUTLOOK FOR LONG-RUN STABILITY, AND THIS WOULD DEPEND TO A LARGE MEASURE ON A STRONG U.S. POSTURE IN ASIA.

10. COMMENT: WHILE NOT COVERING ANY NEW GROUND, THE SINGAPOREANS EXPRESSED THEIR GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS WITH CONSIDERABLE FRANKNESS. THE GOS HAS IN RECENT MONTHS BEEN OUTSPOKEN IN ITS CONCERN ABOUT U.S. INTENTIONS TOWARD SOUTHEAST ASIA. IT WELCOMES A MORE FORTHCOMING U.S. ECONOMIC POLICY BUT, IN THE WAKE OF OF WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM AND THE PLANNED WITHDRAWAL FROM KOREA, IT REMAINS ANXIOUS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE U.S. HAS DECIDED TO PULL IN THE PERIMETERS OF THE AREA IT CONSIDERS VITAL TO ITS OWN INTERESTS, AND THAT THESE PERIMETERS NOW EXCLUDE SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE ANXIETY SEEMS AS YET NOT TOO WELL FOCUSED ON EXACTLY WHAT THE GOS WOULD LIKE THE U.S. TO DO (APART FROM NOT MOVING AS RAPIDLY AS WE HAVE DONE IN KOREA) BUT IS LIKELY TO PERSIST UNTIL THE GOS SEES WHAT IT CAN REGARD AS UNSHAKABLE PROOF OF A CONTINUING U.S. COMMITMENT TO THE SECURITY OF FRIENDLY COUNTRIES IN THE AREA.

11. THE SINGAPOREANS ARE ALWAYS ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF THE UNIQUE VULNERABILITY OF THEIR SMALL, PROSPEROUS CITY-STATE TO OUTSIDE FORCES. THEIR MAIN CONCERN, AS INDICATED ABOVE, IS WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND VIETNAM.

IT IS NOT THEIR ONLY CONCERN, HOWEVER. WHILE THEY ENJOY
GOOD RELATIONS WITH THEIR ASEAN PARTNERS, THEY CAN RECALL
THAT -- IN THE CASE OF MALAYSIA AND ESPECIALLY INDONESIA --
THIS HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN SO. THEY ARE THUS ESPECIALLY
SENSITIVE TO THE ROLE OF THE U.S. NOT ONLY IN BALANCING
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SOVIET/VIETNAMESE POWER IN THE REGION BUT ALSO IN ENCOURAG-
ING THE CONTINUATION OF MODERATE GOVERNMENTS FOLLOWING
COOPERATIVE REGIONAL POLICIES IN THE OTHER ASEAN CAPITALS.
GIVEN THIS PERCEPTION, ANY MOVE THAT CAN BE READ AS A
SIGN OF DIMINISHING U.S. INTEREST IN PLAYING AN ACTIVE ROLE
IN THE REGION PRODUCES AN ESPECIALLY STRONG REACTION HERE.
HOLDRIDGE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, TROOP REDUCTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 22-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977SINGAP03598
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770303-1059
Format: TEL
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770837/aaaabeur.tel
Line Count: 242
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3463fa56-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 MANILA 12767
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1526283
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MFA DISCUSSES GOS POSITION ON U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH KOREA
TAGS: MPOL, PGOV, KS, SN, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3463fa56-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009